

**Belmont Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
June 2, 2005**

Members present: Cynthia Bannon, Garrett Barry, Judie Feins, Cheryl Morrissey, Bill Rudman, Steve Shestakofsky, Bev Witten, Fran Yuan. Also Selectman Paul Solomon.

Members absent: Art Heron, Doug Reynolds, Maria Tourreilles

Liaisons present: Lt. Peter Hoerr, Belmont Police Department; Mike Collins and Kathryn Bonfiglio, BAR.

Member of the public in attendance: David Benoit

1. Minutes of May 19 meeting

There was a discussion about the level of detail in the revised minutes submitted by member Bev Witten. It was agreed that minutes do not generally need to be that detailed, but that the discussion of May 19 was particularly important and should be fully documented. The revised minutes were approved. Bill Rudman will make sure that Sandra Curro and all Commission members receive a copy.

2. Resignation Letter from Bev Witten

There was a discussion of the letter from Bev Witten to the Board of Selectmen, indicating that she did not wish to be reappointed after her term ends on June 30. Bill Rudman objected to what he felt was Bev's characterization of those who disagreed with her as being racists, homophobes, and unfit to be on the HRC. He said it is essential that HRC members respect one another's views without name-calling.

Bev pointed out that the letter reflected her own experience of the Commission, which cannot be invalidated by others. Judie Feins commented that everyone needed to respect Bev's voice, and that the letter (addressed to the BOS) needed no reply. Fran Yuan noted that the level of emotions and tenor of this discussion were troubling; Cynthia Bannon asked us all to consider again the Guidelines adopted for the Commission at an earlier meeting (see below).

Guidelines for the Belmont Human Rights Commission

Everyone's opinions and experiences are valid and should be valued and respected. ALL members need to feel safe to express what they want to say.

It is all right to disagree.

There should be no blame, shame, or attack.

Avoid labeling one another.

Members will take personal responsibility to use and follow these guidelines.

Primary responsibilities of the Human Rights Commission should be "to address complaints of unlawful discrimination and to advocate for fair and equal treatment for everyone."

Steve Shestakofsky commented that, as an organization, the initial team-building effort we undertook has not done away with our basic issues and differences. He sees it as important that the Commission reflect the Town and also reflect populations who feel most at risk of discrimination. If the Commission lacks that representation, those people will not come to this body with problems, and it will thus not be able to serve its core purpose. We need to send the message that this Commission will take them seriously, listen, and give them credence.

Garrett, Steve, and Judie expressed thanks to Bev for her contributions and for her heartfelt efforts. Bev urged the members continuing on the Commission to *create something new—and better—from the interaction of opposing views*.

3. Openings on the Commission

One member (Maria Turrelles) has resigned, and three others have asked that their membership not be renewed at the end of their June 30 terms (Art Heron, Doug Reynolds, Bev Witten). This means the Commission has 4 vacancies. Selectman Solomon indicated it was likely the Board of Selectmen would make these appointments by June 20.

Once the Commission is fully populated again, further trainings and/or a retreat will be needed. Paul Solomon indicated that he thinks he can get the resources to hire a professional facilitator for this purpose. There was a short discussion about possible formats and trainers; Bev and Judie will circulate information on training/facilitator resources.

4. General information

The BOS will hold summer meetings on July 11, July 25, and August 8 ONLY.

Next meetings of the Belmont Human Rights Commission:

- Thursday June 16 at 7 PM Town Hall Conference Room 1
- Thursday July 7 at 7 PM Town Hall Conference Room 1

5. Mass. Association of Human Rights Commissions

The next meeting of the MAHRC is June 10, and Fran will attend. She may share our experience, to see whether other Commissions have experienced similar conflicts and how they have overcome them. Fran will inquire about what it takes to become an MAHRC member.

6. No Place for Hate

There was a discussion of the New England Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate campaign, for which Garrett circulated materials. The first step to becoming part of this effort would be for the Commission to recommend to the Board of Selectmen that the Town join. Once the BOS approved the action, the Commission would need to conduct a minimum of three activities in the first year, in order to become certified as an official "No Place for Hate" community. Other activities in the community (such as BAR events) could also count toward the three. Cooperation between the Commission and BAR/other organizations would strengthen the effort. It was suggested that the Commission become active in the annual Martin Luther King Breakfast, for example.

It was briefly noted that a community member wants to donate funding for a world music concert in Belmont; the Commission welcomed the offer but needs to find out how it can accept and use funds for such undertakings. Fran will contact Town Accountant Barbara Haag about this and also determine the mechanics of accepting grant funding, if we submit proposals. Bill Rudman will draft a letter to the donor thanking him for the offer and indicating we would like to work on this for the future.

Steve suggested that new members should be part of the discussion of what activities to pursue for our first year. He also suggested that the Commission develop some guidelines for what types of events we wish to sponsor and for evaluating specific events offering potential for involvement. The guidelines would help us come to agreement on the value of the activity or event from the standpoint of human rights.

7. Feedback Forms

A number of members (Garrett, Bev, Steve, and Judie) still have not completed tallying the forms they received. Once tallied, they should be turned in to Judie. She will count the number of adult and student responses and begin developing codes for the forms.

Cheryl and Cynthia will assist in coding the forms in June and July. Other members can assist by circling or highlighting the substantive or interesting entries on their tally forms.

8. Liaisons to the Human Rights Commission

a. Role of the Police Liaison

Lt. Hoerr offered a memo he had written concerning how he sees the role of liaison between the Belmont PD and the Human Rights Commission. Members will read and give feedback on the memo. Judie noted her concern about the potential conflict between Lt. Hoerr's role as President of the Police Superior Officers Association and his role as liaison to the HRC, citing the column he wrote that was recently published in the Belmont Citizen Herald. Lt. Hoerr argued that this dual role could work in our favor; they will continue this discussion at a later date.

b. Liaison from the business community

At Garrett's request, Paul Price of Tops Cleaners in Cushing Square has agreed to serve as liaison between the HRC and the local business community.

9. Chair of the Commission

Garrett announced his intention to resign as Chair effective June 21 (just after our presentation to the BOS). Steve suggested that he stay on until there are new members appointed and a full election can be held. Others also urged this. Garrett indicated he would consider delaying his action a while longer.

10. Report to the Selectmen

The Commission is scheduled to appear before the BOS on June 20. We must submit our first full report to them by June 16. A motion was made and passed unanimously, to approve the outline of the report as circulated. Also, a subcommittee was authorized to draft the text and circulate it for feedback from the members.

Respectfully submitted,
Judith D. Feins

